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Personal File

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Subject: ANALYSIS OF CAPTURED GERMAN CIVILIAN LETTERS.

This report is based on the examination of 4600 letters, written between Nov.1st 1944 and March 15th 1945. These letters are from all parts of Germany, mostly addressed to soldiers at the Western front and on the Channel Islands; 90% of the writers are women.

It is intended to give a picture of the state of morale of German civilians as shown by their reaction to outstanding and significant events during the last five months. The report is divided into three parts, covering periods of approx. 6 weeks each. The following items are dealt with:

I. Nov.1st to Dec.15th 1944.

"Total War" measures.
Air raids.
Winter shortages and hardships.

II. Dec.16th 1944 to Jan.31st 1945.

German offensive.
Conditions caused by intensified Allied air raids.
Russian advance and evacuation of Eastern Germany.

III. Feb.1st to March 15th 1945.

Anglo-American advance and evacuation of Western Germany.
Civilians under front-line conditions.
Impending Allied occupation of Germany.

Note: With reference to the appended statistics it should be remembered that writers commenting on topical events will only do so for a limited period after their occurrence.

Nov.1st to Dec.15th 1944.

On the whole civilian writers have no illusions about the ineffectiveness of the Volksturm and the digging of trenches: "Wenn der Volkssturm das Vaterland retten soll, dann ist es nach meiner Ansicht schon verloren". They regard it as a last desperate attempt to ward off the assault of the Allied armies from East and West. Though they realize that hardships are involved in the call-up of elderly men as well as in the enrolment of youngsters for fortification work, there are very few hints that the call-up will be evaded. On the other hand the number of those expressing satisfaction with these "total war" measures is equally small. The majority remains passive and indifferent. "We cannot alter things" (daran laesst sich nichts aendern) and "we just have to stick it out" (man muss es eben aushalten), or "what use is it all" (was nuetzt das alles) and "one gets used to anything" (man gewohnt sich an alles) are typical remarks, which occur again and again.

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Air raids are mentioned in practically every other letter examined, but only about half of those referring to them express any personal views. (Only those cases are covered by the statistics) As a rule people simply state without further comment that there had been air raids. Comments are made in connection with the mentioning of specific damage or of the loss of a near relative or friend, but are generally confined to an expression of helplessness: "Heute war der Tommy wieder hier. Nun haben wir kein Heim mehr und unsere Wohnung ist ausserbraut. Unsere Stadt ist ein Truermorhaufen." This impassive attitude may be due to the letters being written to soldiers at the front, whom the writer does not wish to cause undue worry, or to the state of mind which has come to regard bombing day after day, or night after night as something quite inescapable, something that man is powerless to prevent, and against which he can only hope to protect himself to the best of his ability: "Wenn nur der Luftterror aufhoeren wuerde, dann waere uns schon viel geholfen! Aber wir muessen abwarten und auf Gott vertrauen".

Shortages of fuel, food, tobacco, etc. are mentioned occasionally. The approaching winter fills writers with apprehension: "Was wird das im Winter noch geben? Sicher nichts Gutes. Es ist einem Angst zum Leben". At this stage people still believe or try very hard to believe in Germany's ultimate victory, though they do not stop to reflect how victory is to come about: "Hoffen wir, dass unser lieber Herrgott weiterhilft und unsere Fuehrung gesund erhaelt, die Waffen besonders schnell, damit wir unsere Feinde niederzwingen". There is still some talk of a "miracle" and "the turn of the tide". "We shall win, whatever happens" (wir werden auf jeden Fall siegen), or "we have to win, otherwise everything will be lost" (wir muessen siegen, sonst ist alles verloren), or "we must not lose courage" (wir duerfen den Mut nicht sinken lassen), are typical phrases used at that time.

Dec.16th 1944 to Jan.31st 1945.

Letters written around Christmas show a marked decline of morale. German women, realizing that yet another year has passed and that the 6th war Christmas is upon them, think of the sacrifices they have made, of hardships endured, of families split up, and ask themselves what it is all leading to. There seems no end in sight and no hope for a decent future. Writing Christmas greetings to their nonfolk they ask: "what will become of our children?" (was soll aus unseren Kindern werden?) and "how will it all end?" (wie soll das nur noch enden?); "everybody is longing for the end" (jeder sehnt sich nach dem Ende). Now and again an enthusiastic Nazi expresses belief in the Fuehrer, who "after all knows best".

The German mid-December offensive causes comparatively few comments. A small number of writers express the hope that it will mark the turning point of the war and still fewer venture as far as to hope for "Christmas in Paris" (Weihnachten in Paris) or that "by Christmas we shall have reached the Atlantic Coast" (bis Weihnachten sind wir an der Kueste). By this time the reign of a hard winter makes itself felt in Germany, and people are more concerned with their immediate troubles and difficult living conditions caused by shortage of fuel and coal, the closing of schools, etc. As a result of intensified bombing many towns and villages are without gas, electricity, water, telephone communication and newspapers for days, sometimes weeks. These conditions take the first place in people's minds and find expression in their letters: "Wir leben wie von der Welt abgeschnitten, kein Licht, keine Post, keine Zeitung, kein Radio, das Leben ist kaum mehr zu ertragen".

The offensive is something happening far away from home and few writers expect it to shorten the war. To most people it is an event that endangers the lives of their dear ones and reduces their chances for coming home on leave. On the whole a deterioration of morale - especially while the German offensive is petering out - is clearly noticeable.

With the beginning of the Russian offensive a new picture of life in Germany is revealed. The word "Trek" creeps into letters almost automatically: "Seit die russische Offensive einsetzte, rollen hier Tag fuer Tag endlose Fluechtlingstrucks". Here again facts are stated, but very few comments made. To many, reality is so grim as to make comments seem superfluous. Evacuation, hunger, disease tell their own story. Central Germany filled to overflow with refugees from the East, air raids everywhere, safety nowhere - at this stage women writers do not even try to keep up a cheerful pretence for the benefit of the frontline soldier. Compared to previous months the number of letters which yield no information but are dealing with the writers' private affairs only becomes smaller. The war has penetrated into Germany and affects everybody: "Wenn die Russen nicht zum Stehen gebracht werden, ist der Krieg fuer uns verloren, und alle Opfer sind umsonst gebracht, und wir waeren fuer immer verloren". The almost hysterical fear of the Russians is unanimous. "I am terribly afraid of the Russians" (vor den Russen habe ich fuerchtbar viel Angst) is remarked frequently and "rather die than fall into the hands of these hordes" (lieber sterben als diesen Horden in die Haende fallen).

Feb. 1st to March 15th 1945.

Evacuation in the West, unlike evacuation in the East, frequently causes friction between the authorities and the people. Officials (party, police) have to force unwilling civilians to leave their homes: "Frauen und Kinder wurden hier von den gruenen Polizisten ergriffen, auf ein Auto geworfen und ins Kino gesperrt, bis ein Transport zusammen war". Again and again writers ask their menfolk in despair what to do, where to go, how to seek safety, knowing that there is no answer to these questions. Therefore, in most cases they prefer to remain in their homes, to resort to shelter life while fighting is going on in their own particular town or village, hoping to emerge "when it is all over", and to take up the threads of life where they broke off.

Statistics show that out of those Germans who comment on the Allied advance and on the possibility of their home town being occupied (10% of the total letters covering this period), 60% are indifferent. All they desire is to be out of the war soon and to be allowed to return to their homes and to carry on with their daily routine after the Allies have taken over. Meanwhile they resort to a kind of "wait and see" policy: "Im Innern des Reiches ist auch schon alles ueberfuehrt. Also bleibt uns nichts anderes uebrig, als abzuwarten, was geschieht. Mir ist alles egal". "Farewell letters" to their menfolk at the front show writers realizing that they will not see or hear from their dear ones for a long time, once they are under Allied occupation, but this prospect is accepted in the same passive way as were constant air raids and the shelling of home towns. "The front draws nearer" (die Front rueckt naecher) is almost all they have to say as the sound of gun fire approaches their homes.

25% of those who refer to the Allied advance are afraid of it. Some of these are confirmed Nazis and as such aware of the personal consequences of Allied occupation. True to the lead given by Nazi propaganda they take up the phrase "Rather dead than slave" (lieber

tot sein, als als Sklave leben), in their letters. Others are terrified by the prospect of life in occupied Germany and have visions of chaos and starvation: "Vorläufig gehen wir nichts Gutes entgegen. Es wird die Zeit kommen, da werden wir jede Brotkrume aufsuchen, um uns den Hunger zu stillen".

The remaining 15% almost welcome the impending arrival of the Allies, if only because to them it marks the end of unbearable tension, air raids and uncertainty. "It is so bad now", they say, "it can't possibly become worse". (es kann ja nicht schlimmer werden, als es jetzt ist).

The most recent letters show that the defeat of Germany is by mid-March an accepted fact. It has become obvious that the avalanche of the advancing armies can no longer be stopped, and the arrival of the Allies is anticipated in some places days before they actually reach them. Writers are puzzled. "How could it have happened when once we were masters of all Europe?" They are deeply touched by the destruction of their "Beautiful Fatherland" (unsere schöne Heimat). Remarkably enough with one exception no writer was found to blame Hitler or the Nazi Party for the misery now endured (though the tightening up of censorship regulations has to be taken into account).

After years of Nazi tyranny German civilians are too apathetic to try and realize the wider implications of a Nazi Germany on the verge of defeat. To be re-united with their families, to have a roof over their heads, enough to eat and a job of work to do, is what they hope for after the war: "Wo es uns allen vergoent sein, dass wir nach diesem furchtbaren Voelkerringen wieder friedlich zusammenleben und unser kuenftiges Leben so gestalten duerfen, dass es auch des Lebens wert ist".

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STATISTICS,

	No. of letters	Percentages.
Number of letters read	4600	
Uninformative	1844	40%
Comments on "total war" measures (Volkssturm, Schenken, etc)	313	7%
for	47 (1%)	
indifferent ...	224 (5%)	
against	42 (1%)	
Comments on air raids	1305	28.5%
anxious	559 (12%)	
indifferent ...	746 (16.5%)	
Shortages (fuel, food, clothing, tobacco, etc.)	146	3%
Overwork	61	1.3%
Long in for the end of the war	508	11%
unqualified ...	361 (8%)	
victory	145 (3%)	
Comments on the Russian advance	87	6%
Comments on the Anglo-American advance	78	10%
afraid of it ..	21 (2.5%)	
indifferent ...	46 (6%)	
relieved	11 (1.5%)	
Fear of the future	493	11%
Convinced of victory	123	2.5%
Confidence in the Fuehrer	20	0.5%
Invoking God	234	5%
Doubts of victory	174	4%

* Letters written after Jan. 20th
** Letters written after Feb. 15th